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Chairman: Mr. Kuchinsky ..... (Ukraine)
later: Ms. Groux (Vice-Chairman) ..... (Switzerland)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

Agenda item 101: Promotion and protection of the rights of children (*continued*) (A/59/41 and Corr.1, A/59/184-S/2004/602, A/59/190, A/59/274 and A/59/331)

1. **Mr. Motoc** (Romania) said that his country attached great importance to the full enjoyment of the rights of the child and was strongly committed to implementing the outcome of the United Nations special session on children. Romania fully aligned itself with the statement made by the representative of the Netherlands on behalf of the European Union. Meaningful implementation meant adopting and carrying out a comprehensive set of policies aimed at addressing the basic needs of children in order to make the world more "fit for children".

2. The near-universal ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child had contributed significantly to improving children's conditions across the various regions of the world. However, in some parts of the world, children remained subject to various forms of violence, physical and mental. Those were common practices in so-called "lawless areas", in failed States, or in regions over which central authorities no longer exercised control. A typical example of such "lawless areas" was Transnistria, the separatist province in the eastern part of the Republic of Moldova. The self-proclaimed authorities of that territory tolerated and supported trafficking in arms, drugs and human beings, including children. In the summer of 2004, the self-proclaimed secessionist authorities in Transnistria had embarked upon a course of overt defiance of human rights and democratic norms and values, by denying the basic right to education in their mother tongue, which was Romanian for an important segment of the population. Those actions primarily affected children. The arbitrary closing of a number of schools that used the Romanian language in Latin script and the subsequent inhuman treatment of those children, some of them orphans, who had refused to abandon their schools and as a result had been besieged by illegal militiamen who had eventually forced them out of the buildings at gunpoint, all represented gross violations of the rights of the child as stipulated in the Convention on the Rights of the Child and other international legal instruments. The brutal campaign waged by the authorities of Transnistria against schools using Romanian language and Latin script had been condemned by numerous countries, including the United States, the Russian Federation, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), the European Union and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF).

3. Romania had also condemned those acts and called upon the international community to take appropriate steps to bring an end to the intolerable situation in Transnistria, which affected the lives and wellbeing of thousands of children, depriving them of their basic rights, such as the right to education in their mother tongue. Romania welcomed and upheld the efforts of the authorities of the Republic of Moldova to put an end to the crisis of the schools in Transnistria and apply sanctions adopted by the European Union and the United States against those responsible. Even though recently the so-called Transnistrian authorities had decided to take into account the appeals of the international community and to eventually allow the registration of the schools teaching in the Romanian language with Latin script, his delegation believed that the situation should be monitored continuously until the education process was properly resumed in all those institutions. Romania stood ready to contribute to any concerted efforts by relevant international actors, including the European Union, in order to ensure that the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child were fully implemented and respected, including in the separatist region of Transnistria.

Agenda item 102: Programme of activities for the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People, 1995–2004 (A/59/257, A/59/258, A/59/277 and A/C.3/59/L.13)

4. **The Chairman** drew the attention of the Committee to documents A/59/257, A/59/258, A/59/277 and, in particular, to the Note by the Secretariat on a proposal for a second international decade of the world's indigenous people, as contained in document A/C.3/59/L.13.

5. **Mr. Ndiaye** (Director, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights), introducing the report on the programme of activities for the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People (A/59/277) and the review of the Decade prepared by the Office and submitted to the Economic and Social Council (E/2004/82), said that those

documents described the activities undertaken, as well as the remaining challenges regarding adoption of a draft United Nations declaration on the rights of indigenous people. The General Assembly had called upon Member States to adopt the declaration before the end of the International Decade in December 2004. Although the session was to be extended until the end of November, it was now unlikely that the declaration would be adopted. That was a disappointment. As for the possibility of declaring a second decade, he confirmed that the Office was ready to cooperate with States and indigenous peoples in elaborating a draft programme of activities, should the General Assembly decide to propose a continuation of the Decade.

6. **Ms. Stamatopoulou-Robbins** (Chief, Secretariat of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, Department of Economic and Social Affairs) said that at its 2003 and 2004 sessions, the Permanent Forum had made recommendations to the Economic and Social Council in support of a second international decade of the world's indigenous people. Indigenous issues had first been addressed during the 1950s by the International Labour Organization (ILO) and in the 1970s, by the human rights organizations of the United Nations. Thus, they were not new to the United Nations system. What was new was the high priority accorded to them by the Organization. During the 1990s, the Convention on Biological Diversity and other efforts undertaken by international organizations, including the World Intellectual Property Organization, regarding cultural diversity, the protection of traditional knowledge and indigenous intellectual property, environment and climate change, had also been targeted by indigenous peoples who sought to increase their involvement in those areas of crucial importance to them.

7. Numbering more than 370 million and spread throughout all continents and some 70 States, indigenous peoples interfaced with today's world while maintaining their cultures and identities as groups. Indigenous peoples were among the world's most marginalized and poorest, with health risks disproportionately higher than the rest of the population, with poor formal education and high unemployment. Besides facing social exclusion, indigenous peoples were affected by conflict, killed, enslaved, impoverished, internally displaced or fleeing as refugees, or simply migrating within or across borders. Indigenous communities in developed countries were sometimes referred to as living in "fourth-world" conditions, since they experienced third-world conditions while living in developed and comparatively wealthy nations.

8. The creation in 2000 of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues had signalled a turning point on indigenous issues at the United Nations. It was a concrete achievement of the International Decade, which had aimed at the adoption of a draft declaration on the rights of indigenous people. The position of the Permanent Forum, as a subsidiary body of the Economic and Social Council at a high level in the United Nations hierarchy, was witness to the increasing profile of indigenous issues. The broad spectrum of the Permanent Forum's mandate was another indication, as it was to discuss issues of economic and social development, as well as the environment, health, human rights, education and culture. The mandate also included the mainstreaming and coordination of indigenous issues in the United Nations system. The programme of activities for the Decade revealed that States were determined to end the marginalization of indigenous issues in public policies and to promote an active indigenous participation through constructive dialogue, with the Permanent Forum in a facilitating role.

9. The third session of the Permanent Forum in May 2004 had included all stakeholders: indigenous organizations, non-governmental organizations and representatives of academia, including a very strong participation of indigenous women. Some 70 Member States had also participated. The participation of intergovernmental entities had increased by 43 per cent, a testimony to the growing engagement of the international system with the Forum. At that session, an impressive body of recommendations on indigenous women had been adopted, enriching international policies on gender and making a valuable contribution to the 10-year review of the Beijing Conference on Women.

10. The Forum was fully aware that after the formulation of a good number of recommendations during its first three years, there was a need for prioritization and implementation, for monitoring and coordination. Through its recommendations, the Forum had set foundations for a multi-year programme of work for the United Nations system and others. It had used innovative methodologies, such as high-level panels, expert reports and cross-cutting theme

approaches, and had adjusted to the time constraints of its session, finding the opportunity to meet with and listen to indigenous representatives, Member States and agencies. Throughout its recommendations, the Forum had stressed the importance of focusing on regional issues and finding solutions at that level, in order to become increasingly concrete in bringing solutions to indigenous communities. The Permanent Forum had shown vision by selecting the Millennium Development Goals as the cross-cutting themes for the next two to three years, in order to ensure that the institutional and funding pillars that would be prepared during 2004 would not leave indigenous people in the margins.

11. In closing, she recalled the address delivered by the Secretary-General at the third session of the Permanent Forum. He had recalled the long march of indigenous peoples, from the League of Nations to their current role in the United Nations, and he had said that the time had come to give concrete meaning to the motto of the International Decade: "partnership in action".

12. **Mr. Cumberbatch** (Cuba) pointed out that in the discussion on a draft resolution on the proposal to declare a second decade, reference had been made to the lack of a standard definition for the words "people" and "peoples" in English and "pueblos" and "poblaciones" in Spanish. He would like to know what might be done to ensure that the terms were used in a consistent manner, so as to meet the expectations of the proponents of a second decade.

13. **Ms. Maille** (Canada) said that she was also concerned about the question raised by Cuba. Stressing the attention given by the Permanent Forum to the situation of indigenous women, she noted that the inclusion of the Beijing and Beijing+5 platforms for action in the discussion on the subject was a positive development. She would like to know whether any activities had been planned to follow up on the outcomes of the most recent session of the Permanent Forum.

14. **Ms. Stamatopoulou-Robbins** (Chief, Secretariat of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues), replying to the question raised by Cuba, said that the Permanent Forum had requested the language services not to confuse the terms "people" and "peoples", and the corresponding terms in other languages; however, the variations stemmed from the way the terms had been used in the past in United Nations documents. Replying to the question posed by Canada, she said that the Permanent Forum had drawn up 12 pages of recommendations concerning follow-up on the issue of indigenous women, given that many aspects of that subject had not been addressed in Beijing. Since then, indigenous women had mobilized, organizing regional meetings in Asia, Africa and Latin America. The secretariat of the Permanent Forum had also asked the delegations and the Division for the Advancement of Women for input on how to implement the Forum's recommendations and address gender issues as part of the indigenous-women component of the ten-year review. Indigenous women would also be given a voice at meetings, high-level and otherwise, organized by the Division. The secretariat was trying to keep an up-to-date record of recent developments regarding indigenous women on its Web site. Thus, they should have access to further information with which to prepare for the forthcoming meeting in New York, which would be attended by a large number of indigenous women.

15. **Mr. Stavenhagen** (Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights and fundamental freedoms of indigenous people) said that his report covered the activities that had taken place and the information gathered during the first three years of his mandate. His conclusions were based upon information obtained from a number of sources, including firsthand reports. He had visited Guatemala, the Philippines, Mexico, Chile, Colombia and Canada, as well as indigenous communities in Japan, Botswana, Norway and Finland, and had met with Heads of Government, senior officials, indigenous leaders and representatives, civil society organizations, academic institutions and numerous indigenous communities. In some countries, governments and indigenous communities had already set up mechanisms to follow up on his recommendations.

16. During the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People, the international community had shown increased interest in indigenous people, and progress had been made regarding international and national legislation on the subject. The goals of the Decade had not been met, however, and serious violations of the rights of indigenous people continued to occur. Throughout history, the nearly 400 million indigenous people of the world had suffered discrimination, social exclusion and economic

marginalization. The plunder of indigenous lands and territories and of the resources that were essential to their subsistence economies threatened their social and cultural survival. Governmental assimilation policies had caused many of them to lose their cultural identity. Many indigenous peoples had disappeared, and others had to rely on state assistance. Faced with the violation of all their human rights, indigenous people had repeatedly struggled to protect them, and governments were faced with the challenge of meeting their demands with at least a modicum of consistency.

17. Social and economic indicators showed that indigenous people were victims of poverty and exclusion, and their living standards and human and social development levels were far below national averages. Closing the gap was both a Millennium goal and an objective of the International Decade. The challenge for governments was to develop comprehensive, intensive and sustained policies, such as were rarely applied. In his second report to the Commission on Human Rights, he had specifically addressed the impact of major development projects on indigenous communities, particularly dams and hydroelectric projects which, despite their benefits, had often been devastating for indigenous people, given the serious implications for their resources, the local environment, and their health, living conditions and cultural identity. Such projects had often been accompanied by evictions, displacement and, occasionally, even harassment and violence. There was usually no consultation with the people who would be affected, and indigenous people were struggling to protect their right to such consultation.

18. In his third report, he had focused on the administration of justice, an area in which numerous violations of the human rights of indigenous people had occurred. While some countries were experimenting with alternative legal institutions, in many others indigenous people lacked equal access to the courts and suffered discrimination, especially in regard to their culture and their language. The trend towards criminalization of indigenous social and political protest activities, sometimes even using antiterrorism legislation, was a matter of particular concern. Such measures were not limited to states of emergency or authoritarian regimes, but had also been applied in open societies characterized by transparency and the rule of law.

19. Indigenous women, who had always suffered many types of discrimination, were especially vulnerable. While public institutions had a duty to protect the rights of those women, their own communities also had a responsibility in that regard, and they should give priority to addressing the matter. The situation of indigenous children in some countries was dismal. The forced recruitment of indigenous boys and adolescents in situations of armed conflict was a particularly serious issue. In those areas, the very survival of especially vulnerable communities was threatened. He urged the international community to take preventive and protective action in that regard.

20. His mandate also provided for him to communicate regularly with governments concerning alleged violations of the human rights of indigenous people, with the aim of protecting victims as a group. According to the mandate, indigenous people were those who identified themselves and were recognized by others as such, whether or not a formal definition existed. His next thematic study would focus on education and indigenous people.

21. The creation of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, the mandate of the Special Rapporteur and the activities of the Working Group on Indigenous Populations were important milestones in the international effort to address the needs of indigenous people. Those efforts would be to no avail, however, in the absence of a declaration of principles to protect the human rights of indigenous people. He therefore appealed to Member States to adopt the draft United Nations declaration on the rights of indigenous people.

22. **Ms. Maille** (Canada) recalled that a meeting had been held in May, not organized by the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues but with the participation of members of the Permanent Forum, the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights and fundamental freedoms of indigenous people, and the Special Rapporteur on violence against women. The causes and consequences of violence against indigenous women had been discussed, with a view to raising awareness on the issue and considering the possibility of cooperation with the Special Rapporteur in that regard. She asked Mr. Stavenhagen whether he was considering options for cooperation with other United Nations special rapporteurs.

23. **Mr. Litver** (Netherlands), speaking on behalf of the European Union and referring to the matter of social discrimination against indigenous people – which, according to the report of the Special Rapporteur, was the cause of their problems in the criminal justice system – asked Mr. Stavenhagen how such problems could be solved and what might be the role of customary law in ensuring that justice was done. In carrying out his mandate, the Special Rapporteur had emphasized the rights of indigenous women and girls, and at its last session, the Permanent Forum had done likewise. He would like to hear Mr. Stavenhagen's views as to what were the most crucial problems facing indigenous women and girls and what actions should be taken at the international, national and regional levels to follow up on his recommendations.

24. **Mr. Nurnberg** (Norway) said that the creation of the Permanent Forum and the mandate of the Special Rapporteur were among the most important accomplishments of the International Decade, and it was everyone's responsibility to carry the work on the draft declaration to a satisfactory conclusion. The role of the Permanent Forum and whatever influence it might have in future would depend on whether or not it was able to make clear and practical recommendations to the United Nations and its Member States. He asked the Special Rapporteur how the role of the Permanent Forum as a forum for discussing policies might be preserved and strengthened, and how he might contribute to that objective.

25. **Mr. Stavenhagen** (Special Rapporteur) said that cooperation between the various mechanisms of the Commission on Human Rights and, where possible, the United Nations system, was at optimal levels. The annual meeting of special rapporteurs in Geneva provided an opportunity for cooperation and exchange of information among them. The technical assistance provided by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) enabled them to cooperate with Member States in dealing with alleged human rights violations and to work with the different committees created under the treaties on indigenous rights. On several occasions, he had cooperated with the members of the Permanent Forum so as to avoid duplication of efforts and coordinate activities. He had also met with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) on the issue of education and indigenous people. Two members of the Permanent Forum had joined him in those discussions.

26. The issue of indigenous women and girls was a very important one, given the seriousness of their situation in many countries. The problem had not received the attention it deserved from governments, the international community or non-governmental organizations. On his visits, he always tried to meet with representatives of indigenous women and girls and make recommendations that would draw the situation to the attention of Member States. Unfortunately, there were very few statistics on the subject, and except in a few cases, the data had not been broken down. He had also met with the Executive Director of UNICEF to discuss the plight of indigenous girls and adolescents around the world who were victims of serious human rights violations which were often unknown to the general public.

27. On the question of action taken to follow up on his recommendations, he said that an initiative had been undertaken by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, the European Union and several of the countries he had visited, with the participation of governments and indigenous communities, to implement and follow up on those recommendations. He looked forward to seeing satisfactory results in 2005. With regard to the administration of justice, he stressed the importance of recognizing and respecting customary law. Some countries had already put in place special procedures that took into account the important role of customary law in ensuring more efficient, even-handed and impartial justice.

28. **Ms. Taracena Secaira** (Guatemala) said that the United Nations Human Rights Verification Mission in Guatemala was departing after ten years, thus terminating the funding of certain programmes. She drew the attention of the Special Rapporteur to paragraph 57 of his report (A/59/258), which including the following: "Indigenous people (around 12 million Maya, Xinca and Garifuna)". While it was difficult to determine what percentage of the Guatemalan population was indigenous – especially since the most recent census counted persons who considered themselves to be indigenous as such – the total population of Guatemala was 12 million.

29. *Ms. Groux (Switzerland), Vice-Chairman, took the Chair.*

30. **Mr. Stavenhagen** (Special Rapporteur) said that it was difficult to determine the indigenous population, since that was a grey area. He would ask the Secretariat to make the necessary corrections in the text.

31. **Mr. Meyer** (Brazil), speaking on behalf of the Rio Group, said that the review of the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People showed that progress had been made in solving the problems of indigenous communities. Much remained to be done, however. The Rio Group supported the proposal for the declaration of a second decade so as to encourage the adoption of new norms and policies aimed at ensuring full respect for indigenous rights. The establishment of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues and the creation of the position of Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights and fundamental freedoms of indigenous people were two of the most significant achievements of the Decade. The draft declaration on the rights of indigenous people, to be completed in 2004 by the Commission on Human Rights Working Group elaborating a draft declaration, would be another important achievement.

32. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights had also helped to assess the results of the Decade by drawing up a questionnaire to record the views of indigenous organizations concerning the advisability of declaring a second decade. All respondents had mentioned the progress made, the improved access to development projects, the strengthening of local indigenous organizations and the increased indigenous involvement in those organizations. Those achievements should be reinforced, in order to secure recognition of the identity of indigenous people and increase their involvement in political institutions, as well as in decision making on issues that directly affected them. The Decade had also helped to increase interaction between indigenous organizations and the number of programmes, projects and activities geared toward indigenous people. All of those changes should be extended and consolidated, and that would be facilitated if a second decade was declared.

33. The creation of the Inter-agency Support Group on Indigenous Issues had improved cooperation between almost all the departments, programmes, funds and specialized agencies and financial institutions, such as the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank. Training and academic activities in the field of human rights and fellowship and technical cooperation programmes were also part of the effort to improve the living conditions of indigenous people around the world. In addition, the four reports on indigenous issues prepared during the Decade by the Sub-Commission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights had encouraged Member States and the international community to take action on the subject.

34. The Rio Group wished to thank the donor countries for their contributions to the Voluntary Fund, which had helped finance 176 indigenous projects in different regions of the world, including 15 in Rio Group countries, and had enabled around 560 representatives of indigenous people to participate in events that were of interest to them. The Group also believed that regional summits for indigenous women and people should be encouraged, in order to address the issue of mass media and develop communications policies designed to protect human rights and the rights of indigenous people.

35. **Mr. Leslie** (Belize), speaking on behalf of the member States of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), said that one of the greatest achievements of the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People had been the establishment of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. The Caribbean Community welcomed the decision taken by the Economic and Social Council to recommend to the General Assembly that it should declare a second international decade of the world's indigenous people after the conclusion of the current Decade at the end of 2004.

36. As the Decade drew to a close, CARICOM hoped that a special effort would be made to realize its aims, including the adoption of the draft declaration on the rights of indigenous people by the end of 2004. The Caribbean Community thanked those who had supported the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Indigenous Populations and encouraged delegations to support resolution 56/140, in which the General Assembly had decided that the Fund should be also used to assist representatives of indigenous communities and organizations in attending, as observers, the sessions of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. The Caribbean Community also encouraged governments to contribute to the United Nations Trust Fund for the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People.

37. Education was a critical component for the promotion and protection of the human rights of indigenous populations. In that regard, the Indigenous Fellowship Programme contributed greatly to strengthening the human and institutional capacities of indigenous people to actively participate in the decision-making process and enhance their knowledge in regard to human rights issues and how they affected their right to development.

38. The Caribbean Community saw itself as playing an important role in the development of the world's indigenous people, as shown by the commitment of its member States to protecting and improving the quality of life of their indigenous people, especially children, who were among those with less access to education, health care and a better environment in which to grow up. The historic agreement signed in 2000 by the Maya community and the Government of Belize, whereby the Government recognized that the Maya people had rights to lands and resources in southern Belize, based on their longstanding use and occupancy, was an indication of the commitment of CARICOM States in that regard. Currently the Government, in consultation with the leaders of the Maya community, was implementing its National Poverty Elimination Strategy and Action Plan, and as a result had built schools, provided access to new technologies and preserved the environment while respecting and preserving the indigenous communities' cultural values. Although the member States of CARICOM were committed to the development of their indigenous communities, in many instances their efforts had been hindered by natural disasters, which in a matter of hours could destroy years of development, as had been the case in 2004 when hurricanes had devastated several islands in the Caribbean.

39. The Government of Guyana had collaborated with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and UNICEF to improve the socio-economic development of its indigenous peoples, with intensified focus being placed on poverty alleviation and the improvement of health care and education. In that regard, several initiatives had been undertaken with a view to improving the quality of education offered to students of the hinterland communities, through the Primary Education Improvement Programme, the Secondary School Reform Programme and the Guyana Basic Education Training Programme.

40. The actions undertaken by the Commonwealth of Dominica in favour of its indigenous people included the creation, in 2000, of the Department of Carib Affairs in the Office of the Prime Minister. That decision had given a heightened level of urgency to the issues confronting Dominica's indigenous Caribs. In 2002, Dominica's Government had undertaken an integrated planning process for the Carib territory focused on sustainable agriculture, education, economic development, tourism and cultural recuperation. The European Union and the Caribbean Development Bank had already expressed their interest in that project. In the last three years, the Government of Dominica had also endeavoured to increase the number of Carib students attending university programmes and had established a task force to further Carib education.

41. In recognition of the important contribution of indigenous people and against the backdrop of the imminent conclusion of the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People, the Surinamese Government had proclaimed 9 August as National Day for Indigenous People. Suriname was home to a wide variety of ethnic groups, which resulted in an enormous cultural diversity. Its Government was aware of the fact that conditions for the indigenous people had to be improved, and was working in consultation with all interested parties to address the concerns facing that group.

42. In December 2004, the International Decade would come to a close. Although many important gains had been made, many indigenous people continued to live in abject poverty and experienced human and civil rights violations and discrimination. The Caribbean Community therefore urged all Member States, as well as the international community, to strive harder to ensure that the conditions of their indigenous people improved, and that their civil rights were always respected and protected.

43. **Mr. Merits** (Estonia) said that although his country's views on agenda item 102 were fully reflected in the statement of the European Community, he would like to stress a few points of special interest to the Estonian delegation. Firstly, Estonia fully supported the goal of giving indigenous people the opportunity to influence their own destiny and safeguard their identity. It also supported the adoption of the declaration on the rights of indigenous people in the near future. However, despite the progress that had

been made in regard to many issues related to the problems of indigenous people , the preservation of their language and culture was still a matter of concern for many of them.

44. Already ten years earlier, the Working Group on Indigenous Populations had elaborated the draft declaration on the rights of indigenous people. Estonia attached the utmost importance to the elaboration of the instrument and the participation of indigenous representatives in the process, but would like to emphasize the need to unlink the elaboration of the declaration from the proclamation of the new international decade. Although the current Decade had helped advance understanding of the problems of indigenous people, much still needed to be accomplished. Accordingly, Estonia supported the idea of proclaiming a new decade, and was prepared, within the limits of its resources, to contribute to the Voluntary Fund for the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People. Estonia also intended to actively take part in the work of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues.

45. Estonia was especially concerned about the problems facing the Finno-Ugric and Samoyed peoples, who were all speakers of the Uralic languages. Among the Finno-Ugric peoples, only Estonians, Finns and Hungarians had achieved statehood. Most of the other Finno-Ugric peoples lived in the Russian Federation. According to the census data of 2002, their numbers had fallen dramatically since the 1989 census, from 3.3 million to 2.7 million. The number of people who still spoke one of the Uralic languages had decreased to less than 2 million. Statistics showed that the percentage of the population that spoke one of the Finno-Ugric languages had been constantly declining. The Karelians were a clear example of that trend. They made up nine per cent of the population of the Karelian Republic in the Russian Federation, and only around 50 per cent of them could still speak their mother tongue. A discouraging development in that respect was the decision of the Russian State Duma, adopted on 15 November 2002, requiring the use of a Cyrillic alphabet for the official languages of the Russian Federation and its republics. In the case of Karelia, that meant that Karelian could not be used as the official language of the Karelian Republic, because it used the Latin alphabet.

46. The final document of the fourth World Congress of Finno-Ugric Peoples, held in Estonia in August 2004, expressed the concern of Finno-Ugric peoples at the constant deterioration of their national identity and called upon the international community to pay greater attention to the protection of the rights of indigenous peoples. The Congress had also stressed the need to increase opportunities to use native languages and to take measures to preserve and develop education in the native languages of the Finno-Ugric peoples. The Congress had drawn attention to problems relating to the exploitation of natural resources in the traditional territories of the Finno-Ugric peoples, in particular the extraction of oil, which could lead to a degradation of the living environment of the indigenous population, a problem which had already been encountered in many parts of the world.

47. **Ms. Critchlow** (Guyana) said that her delegation endorsed the statements made by the representatives of Belize and Brazil on behalf of CARICOM and the Rio Group, respectively. While the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People and the establishment of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues had helped bring to the attention of the international community the concerns of indigenous people on matters such as economic development, culture, the environment, education, health and human rights, challenges remained. The high incidence of poverty among indigenous people, lack of access to education and health facilities, abuses of their human rights and exclusion from decision making perpetuated their marginalization in many parts of the world. In fact, as noted in the report of the Secretary-General on Implementation of the programme of activities for the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People (A/59/277), a substantial number of indigenous persons were still of the view that there had been no improvement at the community level, and a smaller number had suggested that conditions had worsened. The declaration on the rights of indigenous people, in which so many had placed high hopes, had still not been elaborated. States might wish to recall that the rights of indigenous people were human rights and should be respected.

48. As a multi-ethnic developing country, Guyana accorded priority to social cohesion and the participation of all its citizens, including Amerindians, in the affairs of the nation. That was considered essential to the strengthening of democratic systems and the achievement of sustainable development. Every effort had therefore been made to ensure that

indigenous people enjoyed all their human rights and fundamental freedoms. Often innovative approaches had been adopted to ensure the provision of key social services, given the remote locations and small sizes of many Amerindian communities, an example being the "escuela nueva" initiative for early childhood and primary education.

49. Prior to the proclamation of a Decade for the World's Indigenous People, Guyana had undertaken at the international level a commitment to ensure respect for the rights of indigenous people, as shown by the establishment, in 1993, of a Ministry of Amerindian Affairs to ensure the welfare and development of indigenous communities. So far 74 of the 120 Amerindian communities had been issued titles to ancestral lands. Access to quality education and health care facilities had been improved, and management training was ongoing to strengthen community leadership. In 2004, the national budgetary allocation had been almost doubled to intensify socioeconomic development in Amerindian communities, in keeping with the national poverty eradication strategy. Meanwhile, the Indigenous Peoples Commission had been constituted, and the 1951 Amerindian Act was being revised to reflect current realities.

50. Dialogue with indigenous communities and the assistance of the international community had helped to overcome hindrances that impeded the full participation of indigenous peoples in the affairs of Guyanese society. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), in collaboration with UNICEF and the Canadian International Development Agency, had funded a project intended to create a better quality of life for Amerindians. The project was already yielding results. It was clear, however, that more still needed to be done. Mortality and illiteracy rates remained high in comparison to other groups, in addition to pervasive poverty, which was more severe among indigenous women. Another challenge was the expansion of the instruction programme of indigenous children in their native tongue from some to all indigenous languages.

51. Guyana was supportive of the proclamation of a second international decade of the world's indigenous people which, coupled with a well thought out programme of activities, could build on the momentum of the first Decade and assist in the consolidation of the rights of indigenous peoples. Further, Guyana urged delegations to adopt a more flexible approach, so that consensus could be reached regarding the adoption of the draft declaration on the rights of indigenous people. Her delegation called upon States which were in a position to do so to increase their contributions to the Voluntary Fund for Indigenous Populations.

52. **Ms. Espindola** (Ecuador) said that her delegation endorsed the statement made by the representative of Brazil on behalf of the Rio Group. The International Decade of the World's Indigenous People had provided a valuable opportunity to reflect upon the situation of indigenous peoples, value and respect their identities and find viable solutions to the urgent problems facing them. One of the main achievements of the Decade had been the creation of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, which reflected the commitment of the international community to deal with issues that would affect the future development of indigenous peoples. The Permanent Forum provided a setting in which State representatives and indigenous people could come together to address and resolve issues that were of concern to indigenous peoples, not only in the field of human rights, but also in areas such as economic and social development, education, culture, health and the environment. It was also a token of the Organization's interest in measures that benefited indigenous people and a channel that could be used by indigenous representatives to raise awareness regarding the most serious problems they faced. Her delegation was in favour of declaring a second decade of the world's indigenous people, in order to bring greater momentum to the work carried out thus far, consolidate the achievements of the first Decade and work towards new goals that would contribute to the full development of indigenous people.

53. Ecuador was home to 12 nationalities and over 17 ethnic groups. That diversity was acknowledged in the country's Constitution, which described Ecuador as a constitutional State in which the law guaranteed the social welfare of all its people. The Constitution provided a legal framework that fostered the participation of ethnic minorities in political structures and processes and ensured that they could exercise their constitutional rights in both the public and the private spheres. The basic principles of ILO Convention 169 concerning indigenous and tribal peoples in independent countries were explicitly included in the Constitution. The Ecuadorian State recognized and guaranteed the observance of the human and collective rights of indigenous peoples, as

well as their right to maintain, develop and strengthen their spiritual, cultural, linguistic, social, political and economic identities and traditions, retain inalienable ownership of communal lands and maintain ancestral possession thereof. The indigenous movement was very active in Ecuadorian political life, as shown by the provincial elections held in October 2004, where indigenous candidates had won 24 mayoralties and seven prefectures. It was therefore clear that the political rights of indigenous peoples had been fully recognized.

54. Ecuador was committed to promoting the human rights and the economic and social development of all its inhabitants. Contributing to the welfare and progress of indigenous people was in the national interest. Stressing her delegation's strong support for the work of the Permanent Forum, she commended the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights and fundamental freedoms of indigenous people for his work, and expressed the hope that the Commission on Human Rights Working Group elaborating a draft declaration on the rights of indigenous people would conclude the task entrusted to it. Indigenous people deserved special attention, as they were most affected by hunger, poverty, the lack of basic services and malnutrition. The full attainment of the Millennium Development Goals was thus essential to their well-being and advancement. The international community had an ineluctable responsibility to that important sector of the world's population.

55. **Ms. Booto** (Democratic Republic of the Congo) recalled that the objectives laid down in the programme of activities for the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People included the strengthening of international cooperation for the solution of problems faced by indigenous people in areas such as human rights, the environment, development, health, culture and education. The events of the International Decade had unfolded in a generally positive manner, as far as the accomplishment of the objectives was concerned. The profile of indigenous people had been raised in the eyes of the international community, and they had a better grasp of the human rights protection system and how they could use it to further their interests.

56. The Democratic Republic of the Congo, whose population included many different ethnic and tribal groups, had always pursued a broad policy of integrating all its inhabitants into the national society. Thus, it had hailed the creation of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues as the culmination of a process that had begun with the World Conference on Human Rights held in Vienna in 1993. Her delegation commended the Permanent Forum for its working methods, its strong cooperation with other United Nations institutions and, in particular, the themes it had chosen for its sessions, especially the most recent one, which had been dedicated to indigenous women. The United Nations Voluntary Fund for Indigenous People was a crucial tool which had provided direct assistance to indigenous delegations and afforded them the opportunity to participate in the work of the United Nations.

57. Many important activities had been organized throughout the Decade, including the workshop on indigenous people, private sector natural resource companies and human rights; the seminar on multiculturalism in Africa; and the human rights training programme, which had featured the active involvement of indigenous people. The Indigenous Fellowship Programme was particularly noteworthy, as it enabled grantees to acquire practical experience by participating in United Nations meetings and applying what they learned for the benefit of their communities.

58. Despite the positive developments of the Decade, her delegation felt that a long road still lay ahead, and it would be a long time before indigenous people were able to fully exercise their rights, particularly the right to preserve their native cultures, which was one of the cornerstones of the defence of indigenous human rights. Another objective laid down by the General Assembly was that of promoting the adoption of a draft United Nations declaration on the rights of indigenous people. In that regard, her delegation hoped that the members of the Commission on Human Rights Working Group elaborating a draft declaration would achieve a consensus. It was important to follow through with the work that had begun so as to continue moving towards the attainment of all the rights and freedoms of indigenous people. Her delegation therefore supported the recommendation of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues concerning the proclamation of a second international decade of the world's indigenous people.

The meeting rose at 5.00 p.m.